

Statement by Oliver Dowden on the European Super League

Madam Deputy Speaker,

Football is in our national DNA.

We invented it, we helped export it around the world, and it has been a central part of British life for over a century.

Football clubs aren't just businesses; they define communities across the country.

So along with almost every member of this House I suspect, I was appalled by the announcement made late last night that a handful of clubs are proposing to form their own breakaway European league.

These six clubs announced this decision without any consultation with football authorities, or with the government. But worst of all, they announced it without any dialogue whatsoever with their own fans.

It was a tone-deaf proposal, but the owners of those clubs won't have been able to ignore the near universal roar of outrage from all parts of the football community over the past 24 hours.

This move goes against the very spirit of the game.

This is a sport where a team like Leicester City can ascend from League One to the Premier League title in under a decade, earning the right to go toe-to-toe against European heavyweights in the Champions League.

Instead, a small handful of owners want to create a closed shop of elite clubs at the top of the game – a league based on wealth and brand recognition rather than upon merit.

We will not stand by and watch football be cravenly stripped of the things that make millions across the country love it.

As a Conservative I believe passionately in defending our nation's institutions and rich heritage. They are central to our identity and help build a sense of solidarity between people from every generation and every background.

Just as the Government wouldn't hesitate to act when other treasured areas of our national life are under threat, nor will we hesitate to protect one of our greatest national institutions: football.

This is for football authorities to handle first, and today I have met with the Premier League, the Football Association and the president of UEFA, while the Sports Minister has had a further meeting with the Football Supporters'

Association.

The football authorities have robust rules in place to deal with this, and I know from my conversations today that they are rightfully considering a wide range of sanctions and measures to stop this move in its tracks. My message to them was clear: they have our full backing.

But be in no doubt: if they can't act, we will.

We will put everything on the table to prevent this from happening.

We are examining every option, from governance reform, to competition law, and the mechanisms that allow football to take place. Put simply, we will be reviewing everything the Government does to support these clubs to play.

I discussed our options with the Prime Minister this morning, and we are working at pace across government and with the football authorities.

I want to reassure this House of a very robust response. We will do whatever it takes to protect our national game.

But it's clearer than ever that we need a proper examination of the long-term future of football.

To many fans in this country, the game is now almost unrecognisable from a few decades ago.

Season after season, year after year, football fans demonstrate unwavering loyalty and passion by sticking by their clubs.

But their loyalty is being abused by a small number of individuals who wield an incredible amount of power and influence.

If the past year has taught us anything, it's that football is nothing without its fans. These owners should remember that they are only temporary custodians of their clubs, and they forget fans at their peril.

That's why over the past few months I have been meeting with fans and representative organisations to develop our proposals for a fan-led review. I had always been clear that I didn't want to launch this until football had returned to normal following the pandemic.

Sadly, these clubs have made it clear that I have no choice. They have decided to put money before fans. So today I have been left with no choice but to formally trigger the launch of our fan-led review of football.

The review will be chaired by the Honourable Member for Chatham and Aylesford and will be a root-and-branch examination of football in this country.

It will cover the financial sustainability of the men's and women's game, financial flows through the pyramid, governance regulation and the merits of an independent regulator.

Crucially, in light of this weekend's proposal, it will also consider how fans can have an even greater say in the oversight of the game, and the models which might best achieve that.

We are the people's Government. We are unequivocally on the side of fans – and their voices have to be heard when it comes to the future of our national game. It starts with fans, and it ends with fans.

But in the meantime we have thrown our full weight behind the football authorities and stand ready to do whatever is necessary to represent fans and protect their interests.

I commend this statement to the House.